LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 438
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

Secret Memoirs of a French Royal Mistress

(MARQUISE DE POMPADOUR)

Collected and Arranged by

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INTRODUCTION

Some time before her death in 1764, Madame de Pompadour called her most trusted servant to her and placed within his safe-keeping a sealed packet with the instruction that it was to be delivered to her brother, the Marquis de Marigny, directly after her death.

The Marquis died in 1781, and his art treasures, which were most valuable, and his library, were sold at auction. Among the volumes sold there was one which, under a false title and binding, contained the manuscript of the secret memoirs on which this book is based.

The purchaser of the old book happy in his treasure trove, made no complaint of the deception. He published the Memoirs in Holland. The work is more than a hundred years old. For the men of its own time it does not contain a single line which is not interesting, but it is not so for us. We have, therefore, omitted the political dissertations and have only preserved what is romantic and dramatic. Anecdotes, curious pictures, and dramas, abound in the Memoirs of the Marquise, and we feel certain that, freed from the political passages now out of date, and rendered more intelligible by a few annotations, these curious Memoirs of the most celebrated woman of the eighteenth century will have the same success now that fell to their lot over one hundred years ago.

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SECRET MEMOIRS OF A FRENCH ROYAL MISTRESS

CHAPTER I

MONSIEUR AND MADAME POISSON

Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour, was born in Paris in 1722. Her father, Antoine Poisson, was the son of a weaver belonging to the little village of Prevenchéres, near Langres; her mother was the daughter of M. Jean Baptiste de la Mothe, a Government contractor.

Her origin was, therefore, a very modest one, but there was nothing to be ashamed of in it; and it is somewhat singular that nobody ever reproached her in regard to it, except those who were no better born than herself.

Before he rose to the high position to which he subsequently attained, Antoine Poisson, who went to Paris during the war of 1700, was at first attached, in a subordinate position, to the commissariat of the army, but subsequently filled the most responsible posts in the employ of the firm of Paris Brothers.

The commencement of his career was laborious and beset with difficulties. Public ignorance in regard to financial matters allowed the Regent, Monseigneur Philippe d'Orléans, to effect a political diversion by sacrificing, to public opinion, the financiers who had rendered very great service, and without whom Marshal de Villars would not have been able to carry on the campaign. M. Antoine Poisson found himself compromised in this affair. He was obliged to fly.

Two years previously to this, he had married. In the Mdlle. de La Mothe, he married a girl of touching beauty, and a mind at once earnest and acute. By this marriage, he had

a little daughter, Jeanne Antoinette, whom he adored. Fortunately, the chief clerk in the house of Paris Brothers had, in his wife, a sound head, a brave heart, and a truly graceful and beautiful woman—never a detrimental element.

Madame Poisson was indefatigable in her efforts to arrest the proceedings against her husband. Through her father, M. de La Mothe, she belonged to the financial world; by means of her receptions, her wit and her grace, the Parisian world, partial to wit, and enamored of beauty, belonged to her.

One does not recoil before any sacrifice, for the being one loves. The greater the sacrifice, the more one feels worthy to be loved. A prude would have allowed her husband to be imprisoned in the Grand Chatelet. Thanks to her relations with the *fermiers-generaux*, Madame Poisson saved her husband. She was maligned, but that did not astonish her.

Madame Poisson at that time received some of the wits, poets, and artists who were destined subsequently to meet her daughter, Madame de Pompadour, at Choisy—Voltaire, Maupertius, Cahusac, Montesquieu, and others less celebrated—charming ingrates! The pride of certain natures compensates itself for being reduced to accept favors by indulging in bantering displeasure. They end by biting the hand they have kissed. We shall very soon see proof of this. Madame Poisson thought she saw her own rare beauty living again in that of her daughter, but she also wished to secure for her a crown of knowledge, and to endow her young intelligence with all the solid and attractive learning which she herself had been careful to acquire. I have already mentioned mathematics, history, and the fine arts.

To accomplish this, she gave her the best

masters after herself; for she was thoroughly versed in financial problems, and had cultivated that innate taste for the arts without which education goes for nothing. Antoinette surpassed her fondest hopes. Her love for the beautiful was as natural as her breathing. Accomplishments and the more serious forms of art formed her taste and developed those natural gifts which she already inherited from her mother—grace both in carriage and gesture.

Before she was fifteen years old she drew and etched admirably. She played on the lute and the basse. At the receptions of her mother, who was intimate with the philosophical party and all the farmers-general, she was initiated into the ideas and passions of Paris.

Madame Poisson, at a very early date, conceived the most lofty destiny for her daughter. Antoinette was a woman at an age when the majority of girls are only children.

She, therefore, tasted very early in life the most delicious and intoxicating of all pleasures—that of pleasing, and very soon she also experienced the strange and ecstatic uneasiness which the first revelations of love produce in the virgin heart. Her mother, whom nothing escaped, spoke of it to M. Lenormand de Turneheim one day, when the latter reproached her for not having brought her daughter with her.

"Why did you not bring my little Antoinette?" he said with the familiarity of a friendship of long standing, which had already given rise to so many calumnies.

"Your receptions are too compromising for her."

"So soon?"

"Antoinette is only fifteen, it is true, but I have noticed in your house somebody who already"—

"I know what you mean," interrupted M. de Turneheim. "You allude to my nephew, M. d'Etioles?"

"Exactly."

"Well, when I see him in love with a girl made after your own image, I feel fifteen years younger, and I look upon him as a nephew worthy of me."

"What? You would encourage this folly?"

"D'Etioles has been quite frank with me. He is over head and ears in love with Antoinette. And when I begged him to wait, he replied that he should die of jealousy. Besides, I should see this marriage with the greatest pleasure. D'Etioles is a gentleman, charming and rich; a *sous-fermier* at an age when Poisson and I were merely clerks; by-and-by, he will be a *fermier-general*. Lastly, as my fortune will one day be added to his, our Antoinette may lead the life of a queen, or, what is still more, a favorite."

There was, in fact, nothing extraordinary or unequal about such a match. The daughter of an army contractor might marry a *sous-femier*. Nevertheless, M. de Voltaire was good enough to say that Madame Poisson speculated on the charms of her daughter. He, doubtless, forgot all about it, later on, when he lavished worship upon her.

CHAPTER II

MADAME D'ETIOLES

Monsieur d'Etioles loved his young wife. He must also have had some trouble in moderating the ardor of a passion which is scarcely in accord with marriage. But by marriage he

wished to effect an entrance into the heart of Antoinette. He pleased her, and, in truth, she owed to him her first intuition of love. But the severe formalities which interrupted their first sighs, and thus brusquely authorized all that she would have only yielded by degrees, disenchanted her with M. d'Etioles.

She skillfully concealed from him this disenchantment, arising from a too abrupt *denouement;* but she always bore him a slight grudge for having too quickly turned over the last pages of her romance. Besides, at fifteen, the age of first desires and first kisses, a girl is not suited to yield to love out of duty.

In the fashionable world eight months are spent in the country, and four in Paris. The young couple, therefore, lived during two-thirds of the year at Etioles, a small castle situated at the extremity of the forest of Sénart, not far from Sougy and Corbeil, in a charming position. The castle was worthy of the nephew of M. de Turneheim. The district was redolent of wealth.

The castle of Etioles always maintained its position. Almost in front of, and close to it, stood the castle of Choisy. And the imagination of the young Marquise was more taken up with that castle than with Etioles.

Amid all the *éclat* of the festivities of Etioles, and the caressing murmuring of a crowd of flatterers, her mind turned towards the residence of the woman who possessed the unique and ineffable privilege of being loved by the King.

This thought absorbed Antoinette. It smouldered in her heart like the spark of a desire which bursts forth into a flame. Sometimes the carriages of Madame de Châteauroux, or

those of the King, passed in sight of Etioles, and they were the breeze which revives the fire beneath the ashes.

M. d'Etioles was blind to all this. In taking upon himself the state of a husband, he had purchased the burden with all its privileges. But Madame Poisson, who could read the eyes and heart of her daughter, understood it all.

Loving her with absolute egotism, she possessed herself of her secret thoughts, made them her own, and with her minute rapidity of action and realization, she conceived the almost insane ambition of raising her daughter from the Castle of Etioles to that of Choisy. I have called it an almost insane ambition because, beautiful as Madame d'Eitoles was, Madame de Châteauroux was at that time in the zenith of favor, and in all the brilliancy of her beauty.

And as happens with women who know and love each other, the mother and daughter understood each other without any interchange of impressions even under their breath. On the 8th of December, 1744, Madame de Châteauroux died suddenly, without any warning. Here is a subject ready to hand for the concoction of pamphlets or tragedies. They were not wanting. Poison was mentioned. Madame de Pompadour, alas! was destined to make acquaintance with this poison later on. It is neither the most rapid nor the more subtle, but to die of it a woman must have loved! Madame de Châteauroux loved Louis.

When the great King fell ill at Metz, the clique of Monseigneur the Dauphin, who surrounded him, profiting by these sorrowful hours to secure their triumph, contrived the disgrace of the King's most faithful friend. It was a cruel blow to her. And when Louis, his

old affection returning with his health, went once more to her, the reaction was so terrible to the poor woman that she felt overwhelmed by it. Ah! I understand it.

Madame d'Etioles was too young to comprehend these great riddles of the heart, and the news of the death of the woman of whom she must subsequently have very often been led to think, not without sorrow, caused her more surprise than pain. Nevertheless, the grief of the King was deep. By way of distracting him, festivities were prepared on an unusual scale in honor of the marriage of the Dauphin and the Infanta of Spain.

These rejoicings took place at Versailles, Compiègne, and Fontainebleau. The city of Paris wished to join in these rejoicings of the royal family. The Alderman organized a grand masked ball at the Hôtel-de-Ville, in honor of the King. The costumes were to be taken from the heathen mythology.

A dais of velvet, silk, and gold, was reserved for the prettiest woman of the middle classes. Madame d'Etioles went to the ball. She was then barely twenty years of age. She was dressed as Diana the huntress. The King appeared. Very soon, amid the thronging and excited crowd, he found himself face to face with the fair goddess. The latter, acting up to her character, with her quiver on her shoulder and her bow in her hand, pretended to let fly an arrow at the King. The prince, always gallant, drew near her.

"Lovely huntress," he said, "the darts you shoot are mortal."

"For everybody but you, sire; the dart I shoot will only have wounded myself."

And she disappeared in the crowd. But only for a moment, for the King lost no time in

rejoining her. A few commonplace remarks were exchanged—hurried words—but full of delight to both.

A short time after this happened, the King was hunting in the forest at Sénart; it was his favorite hunting ground.

Madame d'Etioles knew it; she often rode on horseback there, falcon on wrist, like a *chatelaine* of the Middle Ages, or she drove herself in a phaeton. Everybody at Choisy talked about the huntress of the forest of Sénart. Her beauty and her toilette, the coquetry and taste of which were quite personal to herself, attracted general attention, and were destined eventually to attract that of the King.

One day as she was following the royal hunting party the following incident happened. She was in a carriage made of mother-o'-pearl, in the form of a shell, and drawn by a pair of superb chestnuts. Louis immediately recognized his Diana of the Hôtel-de-Ville ball, whom he had not forgotten. She was recognized equally quickly by the Duc de Richelieu, the Prince de Soubise, and the Count de Chauvelin. These pleasing meetings came to pass again and again. In the evening Louis used to send Madame d'Etioles the choicest game and trophies of the chase. Thus commenced for Madame d'Etioles a *liaison* which ended only with her life.

CHAPTER III

THE PLOT THICKENS

The death of Madame de Châteauroux left a great void in the heart of the King, and, on the other hand, his friends feared lest they should have to succumb to the party of the sentimental and pacific Dauphin. In that case, adieu to pleasure and glory. It was, therefore, necessary to find a female friend for the King,

who would combat the ideas of the Dauphin, and the eyes of his Majesty's friends turned towards the Marquise d'Etioles.

She, both by her education and her connections, belonged to what was called the philosophical party; and although Louis XV had no love for philosophers, whom he confounded with the pamphleteers, and whose impiety was repugnant to him, his friends saw clearly that the liberal spirit of the party might produce a serviceable reaction.

Finally, the relations of Madame d'Etioles with the financial world, and her clear mind, accustomed to deal with financial matters, made them look forward to resources in the event of the outbreak of that war which they were striving their utmost to bring about.

In the drawing-room at Etioles, which they lost no time in frequenting, they found in the Marquise exactly what they expected, a woman at once witty and business-like. These views, adroitly hinted at, encountered no opposition on the part of Antoinette.

She was already familiar with the design they were plotting to carry into effect. Summer returned, and with it the season for residence in Paris. The august friend of Richelieu, Ayen, and Soubise could not appear at the receptions of M. de Turneheim; but the Turneheim residence, situated, as everybody knows, in the Rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, between the Place des Victoires and the Rue du Bouloi, was large enough to conceal an indiscreet interview. Besides, Madame Poisson had been let into the secret.

Nevertheless, the gentleman whom her new friends presented to her invariably preserved

the strictest incognito.* Louis was loved before he deigned to approach the Marquise. His interviews only seemed to increase a passion already awakened, but, nevertheless, everything remained buried in mystery.

On the one hand, the King hesitated to form a serious engagement; on the other, Antoinette d'Etioles, with unyielding firmness, refused to be merely the victim of an ephemeral passion, and while ready to sacrifice everything to Louis, awaited some proof on his part that his attachment would be lasting. It is a fact—and she felt it—that the distance between Versailles and the Turneheim residence is great. The romantic attraction of the secret meetings might in the end fade away.

But fortunately for Antoinete d'Etioles, an important event occurred to throw into the life of the King that amount of novelty, in the absence of which his taste was speedily wearied. Change and other impressions were necessary to a mind as melancholy and apt to grow weary as his was. War broke out. That glorious war, in which he was to gather the laurels of Fontenoy! Madame d'Etioles followed the King. Not openly, but in the equipages of M. de Richelieu. It was a glorious, charming campaign.

In the intervals of the victories the theater of Favart—whose prima-donna Marshal Saxe

*It will easily be understood that the author has said no more on this head. It rests with us to fill up the blank. While the mother conversed with one of the King's friends in one room, the King made love to her daughter in another. Several interviews took place from which the King emerged bewitched with the coquetry of Madame d'Etioles. This coquetry had a hard struggle with the enterprising spirit of the King; but the mother was admirable.

had among his baggage—*fêtes*, joyous suppers in the tents to the sound of trumpet call, *fanfares*, and songs. From the battle of Rocoux, the Marquise de Pompadour took the sketch of a drummer which was subsequently so celebrated.

But who could depict the cold courage and melancholy of the King? Madame d'Etioles was much struck by it. In the campaign of Flanders, Madame d'Etioles learned to understand Louis.

Up to that time she had only seen him gallop by in the forest of Sénart, or at close quarters in those interviews when, divesting himself of his royal state and crossing the threshold of the Turneheim residence, he became merely a man, with a royal cast of countenance, engaged in a love adventure.

Louis XV was passionately fond of the chase. Because, when hunting and riding across the forest, he forgot Versailles and the political labors so repugnant to his character, and because he was then no longer the King. His moral nature, which, with him, was quickly roused, and as quickly subsided, acquired new vigor by violent exercise, and under purely physical conditions. When he mounted his horse he was still the King; when he dismounted, he was merely a man whose invigorated mind was reflected in his large blue eyes and a kindly smile. It was, therefore, a flash.

After supper both expression and smile vanished. A look of mocking skepticism or profound moral lassitude—in a word, *ennui*—became the predominant expression of his countenance. In camp he was a soldier and a gentleman. Action dissipated the clouds produced as

much by the weight of his crown as by a precocious satiety.

Louis had this sad advantage over those who surrounded him, that he had early in life made acquaintance with every pleasure, even the peaceful happiness of virtue. He had been virtuous. He had loved the Queen as his wife. But the degree of latitude in which she had placed her virtues, her icy caresses, and her life of marble, had imparted to him a chill, which the noble girls of the house of Nesle, Mesdames de Mailly and Châteauroux, had had hard work to drive away. He had taken cold near Marie Leczinska; he had drunk of love to intoxication; but intoxication after her left a bitter taste in his mouth.

At forty he had exhausted this last resource. Add to this his political life, that world of littleness and false ideas, of perfidy and ferocious appetite, of cowardice and hypocrisy, and you will not be astonished at his having contracted a species of misanthropic disdain, and the most enervating skepticism. King Louis XV at forty was tired of business, and wearied of everything. He let everything take its course.

His mental disposition, which Madame d'Etiole understood, and undertook to conquer, could not be otherwise than direful to him. Too many enemies were ready to profit by it. She understood that he needed a friend in his mistress, somebody who would conquer his weariness, if possible, and spare him the care of political affairs. Madame d'Etioles was capable of playing such a part. She gave proofs of this during the campaign. She was to be seen, not only in his tent and in the midst of what the Duc de Richelieu called his elegant baggage, but on horseback on the field of bat-

tle, eager to share the fatigues of the King, zealous of proving her courage, dressed as a young musketeer, displaying at morn and at eve in the bivouac all the refined luxury of Versailles.

Louis already discovered that he could not do without her, and, although he did not openly countenance it, the same honors were now paid to her that she received later at Choisy. On her return to France, she would not naturally expect a warm welcome at the hands of M. d'Etioles, whom I have hitherto neglected.

"Sir," she said to him, "I swear to you, that I have always preserved for you the respect and esteem deserved by the most gallant man in France, and that I should have looked upon myself as worthy of contempt and uttermost punishment if I had succumbed to your equal or your inferior. But, sir, before I became your wife, I was the subject of the King."

"Madame," replied M. d'Etioles, "the King does me too much honor, for he is well aware that you have already presented me with two children; but I detest scandal, and, so long as you have my name, I'll thank you to respect it."

The husband and wife thus lived in the house of M. de Turneheim. The Marquise, finding herself a prisoner there, and unable to receive anybody, resolved to break the last links of her chain. One evening she set out alone for Versailles. The King had just come back from Trianon, and at first received her most graciously, but his face became serious when she unfolded her request.

"Sire," she said to him, "I come to ask for a refuge against the power of an enraged husband. Take pity on a woman whose sole crime is her ardent love for you."

"Calm yourself, Antoinette; it is you who are angry. I am not fond of disturbance. What does your husband want of you?"

"He asserts, sire, that he is equally desirous of avoiding a public scandal, and, for that reason, he has made up his mind to shut me up."

The King walked away without replying. His silence and skeptical smile completely upset the unhappy woman, to whom his decision was life or death.

"At least," she resumed, "if I am to be shut up, let it be near my beloved King. Let me still see him, and breathe the air that he breathes."

"What? Live at Versailles! You cannot think of such a thing. This is the residence of the Queen. I repeat it, it is just what I feared —extreme annoyance."

"The annoyance," replied the Marquise, "which, even at the risk of my life, I would spare the King, will be easily avoided."

"Ah! explain."

"Let me be free—let justice give me a complete divorce from M. d'Etioles."

At these words Louis ceased to look at her.

"Oh! Louis, I entreat you," she said, adding the eloquence of her eyes to that of her agitated voice, "I entreat you, Louis, save your friend, do not abandon her to the harshness of a husband, do not exile her from your Court. Let her live to love you and serve you."

They were nearing the palace; before going up the steps Louis had to give his decision.

"Very well, Marquise, so be it, make your arrangement with the Grand Châtelet. I will undertake the rest."

A few days later the Grand Châtelet pronounced a legal separation between Monsieur

and Madame d'Etioles, and M. d'Etioles took his departure into the country, having accepted the post of Chief Inspector of the *Fermes-Generales*, with the reversion of the office of his uncle, Lenormand de Turneheim.

He asked nothing of the King. He left two children behind him; the elder was a little girl, called Alexandrine; the younger a boy, who was afterwards M. de Marigny. But this latter child was too young for M. d'Etioles to entertain for him any of the feelings of a father.

Madame d'Etioles sent her daughter to a convent. She gave up the name of her husband. The King gave her the title of Marquise de Pompadour, with an income sufficient for her rank, for the domain of Pompadour only carried with it the title and an income of four thousand pounds. The last Marquise of the name died after having been involved in the Cellamare conspiracy.

The King, therefore, purchased for her the Marquisate of Crécy in Brie, with an income of twenty-five thousand pounds. MM. de Richelieu and de Soubise attended sedulously to these details.

The new Marquise, as a woman of rank, was entitled to be presented to the Queen and the Royal family. The Princess de Conti was entrusted by the King with this presentation. Marie Leczinska received the Marquise with a kindliness with which she was greatly touched. The Queen even deigned to address certain questions to her, and asked her for news of her friends, the Duchesse de Lauraguais the Marquise de Bellefonds, and Madame d'Estrades. The Marquise, in curtseying to the Queen, replied,

"Madame, I earnestly desire to accomplish all that your Majesty may order for your service." The Marquise had the title of Lady-in-Waiting to the Queen, but she did not fulfil the duties of her office. Other cares estranged her from Versailles and summoned her to Choisy.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THE KING LIVED AT CHOISY

The King loved whatever was young; the silvery laughter of a child quickly smoothed his brow. He lived with his eyes turned towards the past. It was by a similar love for what was smiling and young that Madame de Pompadour succeeded in pleasing him. She shared with him his horror of pedants either in science or morals. He was not an artist, nevertheless he was fond of artists, and without any difficulty laid aside his kingly pride when he found himself in their midst in the reception rooms at Choisy.

Madame de Pompadour set aside two days a week for them. There was conversation, and there was discussion, the King playing the part of listener. No subject of art was neglected. Sculpture and painting did not prevent conversation on most important projects. Engraving, ceramics, and even cabinet-making shared in the honor of the discussion. At Choisy everything, however humble might be its destination, of necessity became an artistic specimen.

After these conversations the chase—the greatest pleasure of Louis XV—when he had not to work with his Ministers, his Secretaries of State. After the chase, the theater in the castle, to which I have already alluded, and then supper. The theater was quite private. It had been built by the architect, Gabriel, after designs by the Marquise; Boucher painted the

scenery. The poets of the household wrote its plays. The company comprised the Marechal de Saxe, the Duc de Duras, the Duc d'Ayen, the Duc de Coigny, Madame de Brancas, and Madame de Pompadour. Last of all came the supper, which was arranged as follows:

The king gave a list of twelve, or, at the most, sixteen persons, to be invited to his table. They assembled in a room, the panels of which, animated by the brushes of Watteau, Boucher, and Latour, represented hunting scenes. Nothing indicated the dining-room. In the middle of the room was a rose-shaped ornament in wood, bordered by arabesques in ivory. The King entered. Two pages advanced towards him to receive his orders, and, on his answer that supper was to be served, the central ornament rose, supported by a pedestal of ivory, and almost simultaneously, as if summoned by a fairy wand, there was a table covered with candles, china, and glass. The guests took their seats; the pages waited on them. Perfect order and celerity were combined in the repast. The Marquise had entered even into the most minute details.

After the first pangs of hunger, engendered by the chase, had been appeased, the general gaiety, to which Louis gave full liberty, found vent in tales of hunting and love adventures. Louis XV, at his own table, was simply the gentleman of the house. Very rarely did the conversation turn on serious subjects, or if they made their way by force of circumstances into the friendly circle, everybody attempted to curtail his view or opinion, and to give utterance only to an abridgment of them.

The Abbé de Bernis, although the only part of hunting which he appreciated was its result, was an invariable guest up to the time when his diplomatic talents were called into play. He

was the most serious member of these gay evenings, and when the conversation did turn on politics, the tone was taken from him. He knew that gravity is not the inevitable medium for business, and that a quiet chat is worth more than formal conference.

M. de Richelieu excelled in recounting those adventures, which Marivaux calls the games of love and chance. His anecdotes mingled with the chink of the glasses, like the rustle of satin petticoats heard in the wings of a theater, and as he spoke, he peopled the room with the phantoms of charming women.

Then M. de Soubise forgot war, Louis forgot the chase, and the Abbé felt himself impelled by invisible wings, and flying towards Cytherea. Still, monotony would frequently have found its way into the daily life at Choisy if Madame de Pompadour had not taken care to vary the amusements. The King loved anything impromptu, and she improvised with all the gaiety and enthusiasm of youth. Song and dance roused every spirit.

At night-fall, to the sound of the horn, carriages and horses retraced their paths to the castle, by the light of the torches carried by the beaters and pages. Thus lived the King at Choisy. Nothing more mysterious took place. The castle, as may be seen, had nothing in common with the Plessis-lez-Tours of Louis XI.

One such evening on their return from the forest—it was an evening in the month of June—the outriders, who preceded the cavalcade, sprang to the side of the road—the carriage of the Marquise stopped.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"Madame," said one of the outriders, "There has evidently been an accident, but not of any importance."

"What is it?"

And she leaned forward to look. She saw a young girl, quite senseless, whom her attendants were raising from the ground. Her first idea was that she had been knocked down by one of the horsemen.

"Bring her to my carriage," she said.

There was a vacant seat in it. The young girl was brought and placed on the seat. The cavalcade then resumed its gallop towards the castle. The young girl had not been knocked down; she had been found lying in the road. When she was near Choisy, she recovered her senses, and looked around her in alarm. The Marquise hastened to re-assure her. She took her by the hands, drew her towards her, and said—

"Fear nothing, my sweet child; I am the Marquise de Pompadour."

But these words only half-reassured her, for her eyes turned at once to the gentleman who was with the Marquise.

"The King!"

However, the King smiled, and did not seem so terrible after all. Then, the suddenly illuminated entrance to the castle, and the joyous shout from the assembled throng, completely roused her from the torpor which had seized upon her.

The King alighted, followed by the Marquise, who held out her hand to the stranger, and said to her—

"Come, my child, you are one of us."

"I, Madame," she said, blushing. "Oh, I dare not! You cannot mean it. I am only a poor peasant, Madame."

"Come; in the country everybody is a peasant."

When they were going up the steps, she trembled to such an extent that Madame de Pompadour forebore to put her timidity to a longer proof.

"I am going to leave you in charge of the porter for a few hours," she said, "but we will come back, and then my carriage shall take you home."

The Marquise called Mesnard, and confided to his care the girl, who was already her *protegée.* After supper the conversation naturally turned on her. The King pronounced her very pretty. And, of course, everybody proclaimed her bewitching.

Besides, fashion in those days had a strong leaning towards peasants and shepherdesses.

"What pretty black eyes. A rather forbidding manner—perhaps, rather fierce. But what freshness for a mere peasant, and what a lovely, rosy mouth. Not a very good figure—but that depends so much on dress."

On the whole, a very graceful girl. Each person imagined a romantic explanation of the singular adventure, and, in order to clear up the multitude of contradictory suppositions, when the King had retired, and the Marquise had only a select surrounding, she proposed sending for the heroine. Madame d'Hausset went to fetch Annette, for so the young girl was called. She made a fourth by the little fireside, on the edge of a settee where the Abbé had already taken his place.

"My dear Annette," said the Marquise, "tell us what happened to you. You know that we found you senseless in the road, on the outskirts of the forest. Do you belong to Choisy?"

"Yes, madame, my parents have a mill there."

"I know your mill, pretty milleress," said the Abbé. "It is situated on a hill bordered with tall hawthorns and elder trees at the entrance to the village, is it not? Is there not a vine in front of the mill?"

"Yes, sir."

"All very gay and charming."

"Well, sir, that vine is the very cause of all

my misfortunes. If my father had been content to sell corn instead of selling wine to the passers-by, nothing would have happened to me. I should still enjoy the esteem and friendship of those I love; I should be married, I should be happy. My father would have kept his good temper, and Jean Renault, my lover, would have kept his love for me, and would not now be like a madman. Oh, madame, I beseech you, you whom we all call our good Marquise, see that justice is done to us, and have the wretch, who has ruined us all, punished."

"What wretch, my child?"

"He is called Dagon, madame."

"Does he belong to this place?"

"No, to Versailles. He is a musketeer."

"A musketeer!" exclaimed the Abbé. "Ah! my poor little thing, I see now the misfortune that has befallen you."

"Oh, sir, I swear to you that it is not that."

"Eh! The name of Dagon, the character of a musketeer, all bespeak an enterprising rascal, most dangerous to the virtues of beauty, especially when accompanied with such pretty eyes as yours, for of all the little millers"——

"Excuse me, Abbé," interrupted the Marquise, "you can hear Annette in confession if you please, but do not deprive us of her tale. You were saying, my child, that this Dagon—? Calm yourself, and rely on my justice to punish the wrong-doer."

Annette recoiled for a moment.

"Madame," she resumed, "I will tell you my history."

And she narrated what follows.

CHAPTER V

THE MILL OF THE VIRGIN

Old Durand, the Miller of Sénard, had a pretty daughter, called Annette. Jean Renault,

a fine fellow of twenty-five, had the best mill in Vanves, and fields of corn and oats into the bargain. Annette was only sixteen when Jean Renault would gladly have married her.

"Father Durand, let me marry your Annette, and she shall be the richest farmer's wife in the country."

"By-and-bye, Jean Renault, my daughter is too young. Let her be a while. She is growing still."

A year later, the same request, the same reply.

"You are joking," persisted the amorous Jean Renault, "Annette is tall and strong. Look at her arm, her shoulder, her figure."

"She is still growing," repeated the obstinate miller, "and marriage would be against nature."

Jean Renault found the time over-long, and by way of beguiling his love, he spent his Sunday and holidays by the side of his Annette. In those days the huge brown sails of the mill were motionless, and the lovers took long walks by the willows which fringed the Yére, or under the old oaks of the forest, passing the hours in a very innocent fashion, devoting half the time to abusing old Durand, and the other half to whispering sweet nothings to each other. A few kisses were exchanged, it is true, but Jean Renault was a good fellow, and his like was not to be found from Sénard to Vanves. He respected the woman who was to be his wife, and his lips only tremblingly and lightly touched the soft cheeks or bare arms of Annette.

Had he not been what he was, in these vast woods. . . . Towards the end of the time they wandered, therefore, in the open fields, and Annette, who also found the time long, dared no more laugh and jest with him, but shared the trouble of his heart and his sufferings.

At length old Durand decided an early date for the marriage, but the good man, in whom his flour produced an unquenchable thirst, at the same time conceived the unfortunate idea of establishing a drinking bar under his vine, where his neighbors and passers-by might find rest and refreshment during the summer. This was a fresh source of suffering for poor Jean. He frequently took the jug and glasses out of Annette's hands, and waited on the customers instead of her. And if any stranger indulged in any familiarity with her, he turned crimson or pale enough to frighten anybody. He was jealous. Annette, who was cheerful but prudent, laughed at his fears without succeeding in reassuring him. He saw harm where she perceived only a joke.

One Sunday there came to Sénard two musketeers, who sat down under the vine in high spirits when they saw Annette.

"Hola! pretty milleress, some wine."

Jean Renault stepped forward to take their orders.

"Does this dolt think he is going to take the girl's place?"

"Be kind enough to be more polite, Sir Musketeer."

"We will be what we please."

"This young girl is the miller's daughter."

"If she is not your wife, what have you to say, you fool?"

They knocked the table again.

"Some wine, you pretty girl."

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" interrupted old Durand, in his gruff voice.

"Here is another of them," cried one of the noisy troopers. "We tell you we intend to be served by the hand of beauty, or, as sure as

my name is Dagon, we will give both you and your donkey-driver a sound drubbing, and we will cut the sails of your mill into ribbons."

And Dagon and his comrade, both of them armed and bullies, like all musketeers, were likely to be as good as their word. Annette reappeared, and served them with liquor; but she was so pale and trembling that even the soldiers forbore to offer her any fresh insolence. But Jean Renault noticed that Dagon devoured Annette with lustful eyes. The air, too, was heavy with a storm; lowering clouds obscured the sky. and the muttering of distant thunder was heard. Shortly afterwards large drops of rain pattered on the vine branches surrounding the arbor, and warned the drinkers that they had better think of beating a retreat.

"Well," said Jean Renault to the host, "do you now see the risk Annette runs by your letting her wait upon your customers? Is it not time—yes or no—for me to take her away to Vanves?"

"Yes, yes," replied her father. "I am convinced. You shall be married in a fortnight; there shall be no further delay."

These promises restored some of their gaiety to the young people, and Jean passed that evening in the mill, in making cheerful plans for the future, while out of doors the wind and the rain raged furiously. It was past eight o'clock when everybody went to bed. Annette, as soon as she went into her room, got upon a chair, and with her candle lighted a wax taper before an image of the Virgin, which stood in a niche on the mantelpiece. Then she proceeded to undress.

She was half-undressed when, suddenly, as if it had been blown in by the wind, her window

burst open, the glass was scattered on the ground, and the candle went out. Annette in terror sprang towards the door, but a man, quicker even than she was, barred the way. This man, as may have been divined, was Dagon, the musketeer.

"Help!" she cried.

But her voice was drowned by the noise of the mill-sails and the din of the storm. She could count on no help but that of the Virgin illumined by the little taper.

"You are mine, pretty one," cried Dagon, as he threw himself on her.

The young girl defended herself with the chairs, the table—everything she could lay her hands upon. Terror lent her activity and unwonted energy. She fled, hid, and fought by turns. The soldier, who at first laughed at a resistance which he though he could easily master, became furious. Every now and then he stopped and looked at her—she was superb! With her hair dishevelled, her clothes in ribbons, her eyes aflame, and herself pale and trembling, she was far more provoking than ever, and this only served to irritate and increase the passion of the coward who was persecuting her.

Then, when the furniture was in pieces, and those pieces were the sole weapons left to Annette, the nature of the struggle changed. The hands of the one combatant sought those of the other, in order to disarm them. And Annette's nails sought the musketeer's eyes, and he, in his turn, was in a pitiable plight.

It was good-bye to his stripes, his decorations, and his epaulets. Twice interrupted, and twice resumed with fresh fury, the struggle was thus prolonged till daybreak. And the

vanquished was the soldier! He withdrew, swearing horribly, and disappeared through the window.

Hardly was he gone than Annette, whose strength was exhausted, fell on the floor, writhed a moment in an agony of pain, and then lost consciousness. In this state, half-naked and stretched at full length on the floor, her father and lover found her.

"Ah! they cried, partly guessing what had taken place, "the wretches! They have outraged her! Poor girl! Dishonored, lost!"

It would be impossible to depict the poignant grief and despair of the father and lover! the father raised his daughter from the ground and laid her still senseless on the bed. At that moment the taper before the Virgin flickered and went out. Jean Renault turned towards the taper.

"Holy Virgin," he murmured, "you have seen a pretty sight! why did you not save her?"

Anger stirred within him, and he turned to the old man.

"You, unhappy man, you are the cause of all this. And now do you think she is fit to be my wife?"

The old miller did not answer a word. The young man went away with death in his heart. But poor Annette, when she recovered consciousness and found herself alone, learned from her father how Jean Renault had left her . . . We will not attempt to recount what ensued. The agony was too acute! What! After having displayed so much courage, after that struggle of hours, to emerge victorious, and be treated as vanquished and dishonored!

"What would you have, my poor girl?" said old Durand. "We found you in such a state.

As for me, I believe nothing—but he, that Jean Renault, is such a fool. He imagined all sorts of things, and shouted 'Lost! Dishonored!' As if it were your fault."

"What do you say?" exclaimed Annette, struck to the heart by these last words. "You, too, my father, believe me to have been overcome by that brigand. As if it were my fault, you say."

"There, there, do not worry yourself, my little girl."

"But it is false, doubly false!" cried Annette, in despair.

"I do not think you to blame."

"It needed only that."

"You are not dishonored."

"Ah, you, my father, actually condescend to believe me."

"And, after all, when we saw you, you were unconscious. He could not help thinking that the coward had taken advantage of you, being asleep."

"Well, and afterwards?"

"What should you know about it?"

"A likely story."

"Well, so much the better, my poor girl, we have only to convince Jean Renault. But I am very much afraid that it will be a difficult matter for of the two millers of Sénard and Vanves, the elder is not the bigger fool. Jean Renault, whom I looked upon as my son-in-law, has gone away convinced. He said good-bye to me, and I regret him, for after all, he has fewer faults than acres, and his mill has more customers than any other for ten miles round."

"As for me," said Annette, "however unjust his opinion may be, I shall never console myself for his loss."

Alas! several days passed and Jean Renault

came not to Sénard. The old man set out for Vanves. It was labor lost. Jean Renault lay hid. He would not see anybody; he would not look on the sun nor let the sun look on him; he was in despair at having wasted his youth on an unfortunate girl, whom a musketeer had reduced to so deplorable a condition. It was more than mourning. He would rather have wept over Annette's death. Old Durand returned to Sénard as he had left it, without having been able to see him.

"I will go myself," said Annette.

Her father consented. They went together, and knocked at the door of the mill at Vanves. They only found Jean Renault's servants. As for him, he remained unapproachable.

"Tell him that it is I, Annette."

"Annette is no more," was the reply he sent.

"Where is he?"

"Up there, in the top story of the mill."

She went up. The inconsolable Jean Renault allowed her to knock for some time, and when at last he made up his mind to let her in, he said:

"Oh, my poor Annette! You who took my heart and my life, and were to have been the happiness of my house. Must I see you once more thus?"

"You are making a great mistake, Jean Renault. What is there between us?"

"Honor," replied Jean coldly.

"What nonsense!" protested the young girl.

But he only bowed his head, replying only by a sad and bitter smile.

Old Durand, in his turn, endeavored to bring him to a more just idea of the situation.

"I swear to you," he said, "that we are mistaken. The musketeer was put to flight without having obtained what he wanted."

"How do you know that?" said Jean abruptly.

"I have Annette's word."

"Alas!" replied the unhappy man, for whom Providence had reserved all the torments of the incredulity of St. Thomas, without giving him the escape which the latter enjoyed. "Alas! it is such a delicate matter. Do you know that if I were to marry, and I found that Annette was mistaken, or had deceived us, I should be capable of leaving her, if indeed I did not kill her."

"The devil!" said the miller of Sénard. "You are a terrible fellow! Very well—I will take away my daughter."

The negotiations were thus broken off. For some time there was no further question of marriage, at all events in words. But the betrothed pair suffered alike, and, when Sunday came, Jean Renault could stay no longer at Vanves, but went for a ramble to Sénard. Annette divined his presence. And so it happened that one morning the pair met on the road to Choisy-le-Roi, on the outskirts of the forest. Annette went straight up to her betrothed.

"I knew you were here," she said.

"Who told you?"

"My heart."

"And what do you want of me?"

"You do not believe my word, and I ought to hate you, but I cannot. I can only pity you. Jean, I love you still, and I pity you. Do you love me?"

"Can you ask?"

"Well, be convinced; and before taking me for your wife, since there is only one way of proving that you are wrong, take me for your mistress."

At these words, so sweet from a virtuous girl

like Annette, Jean stood for a moment thunderstruck and stupefied. Annette went up to him, and threw herself into his arms. He took her, and kissed her with rapture.

Then, suddenly, he exclaimed, with strange abruptness, "Listen to me. Before all, you must be avenged of that Musketeer. The King is going to pass this way. I am waiting for him. I will throw myself in front of his horse"—

"Do not do anything, unhappy man!"

Already the royal trumpets were heard, and the light of the torches glistened through the foliage.

"But we must have justice. You are coming with me before the King."

"No," replied Annette, firmly.

"Ah! You refuse me this."

"It is a senseless proceeding."

"You refuse. You are afraid of being confronted with that Dagon, no doubt. Very well! Away with you!"

And he repulsed the unhappy girl so violently that she staggered, went a few paces towards him again, and then fell to the ground.

* * *

Such was the tale told by Annette.

CHAPTER VI

"LETTRES DE CACHET," AND M. MAZERS DE LATUDE

There was a remarkable increase—I do not deny it—in the number of *lettres de cachet.* But Madame de Pompadour never disposed of them directly; they did not depend on the Marquise, but on the Secretary of State of the King's household, and the lieutenant of police.

The latter had them in blank.* The issue of the remainder was decided upon in Privy Council. They were most frequently used in cases where the honor of families was concerned, or in connection with offenses where publicity was undesirable, the misconduct of a scion of noble family, the abduction or rape of somebody whose name had to be kept secret, a direct attack on the royal power, or some act or writing with the evident intention of troubling the State. They were undoubtedly abused in an infinity of cases. How could it have been otherwise? Even at the termination of a lengthy trial a jury may be mistaken and give a wrong verdict. Far more likely was a lieutenant of police or a Council to condemn the innocent or to pass a sentence disproportionate to the offense or the crime. They might, as I have said, make mistakes; they were also liable to be corrupted. And it is certain, in my opinion, that such was the case. In principle, therefore, *lettres de cachet* are bad. Well, since that was the opinion of Madame de Pompadour, why did she make use of them? Because she knew that all attacks upon herself were really directed against the King, and that in defending herself she was protecting him. If she occasionally showed herself to be pitiless, this feeling must be pleaded as her excuse.

So it was in the case of the unhappy M. de Latude, towards whom she never entertained the hatred which has been attributed to her. These are the facts of the case. On the 15th of May, 1750, Madame de Pompadour received intelligence at Versailles, that a gentleman im-

*And he never refused to give them to Madame de Pompadour.

plored an interview with her on a matter of the utmost importance concerning the King's service. He was called Henri Mazers de Latude, and was a retired officer. Madame de Pompadour received him. He was a young man of pleasing address and distinguished carriage, but his pallor, his attenuated features, and his piercing eyes made a marked impression on the Marquise, who stood before the fireplace attentively examining him as he approached.

"Madame la Marquise," said this gentleman, "I am a retired officer of his Majesty's army, and I served the King up to the Peace of 1748. Since that time I have been tormented with the single desire to render myself useful to the Government and the State. I have studied deeply as an officer of engineers; I am young, and I groan under the oblivion and the obscurity into which I have fallen. I have come to Paris in order to throw myself at your feet, for you, Madame la Marquise, are the hope and support of all men of merit who are sincerely devoted to the King. Yesterday, as I was once more meditating on this project, and while seated in the Tuileries, chance made me cognizant of the most terible plot against your life. Two men seated near me were discussing plans against your person, dictated by the most violent hatred; and I speedily understood that they were capable of anything, even of a crime. I shuddered at the mere idea of the danger which you would run at the hands of such wretches. They moved away, and I followed them to the General Post Office, into which I saw one of them prepare to post a somewhat bulky letter. I leaned forward, and on this letter I read your name. From the conversation of these men I suspected that the letter might contain some subtle poison, and I hastened,

Madame la Marquise, to warn you of the danger."

"I am deeply touched, sir, by your zeal. Rest assured that I will never forget it, and that, when the opportunity arrives for showing my appreciation, I will not fail to make use of it."

As the Marquise was speaking, Madame d'Hausset appeared with a number of letters.

"Ah! this is opportune," she said.

And on the silver salver, among various letters of ordinary size, there was one packet which caught her eye.

"Look here, M. de Latude," she said, "is not this it?"

She was on the point of opening it.

"Allow me, madame," exclaimed the young officer, eagerly, "allow me to open it."

He broke the seal, and the Marquise, not without a terrified shudder, saw a white powder. There was no longer any doubt. Moreover, at this particular period, plots and attempts at assassination were in everybody's mouth.

"Ah, sir," said the Marquise, "put down that letter. Do not expose yourself further." She repeated the expression of her gratitude, and begged him to give her his address. Latude sat down at her table and wrote it for her. He then took his leave, enchanted with the reception which had been accorded to him. Scarcely had he departed than the Marquise read the address he had left, and then turned herself to take up the poisoned letter for the purpose of putting it in a safe place. But to her surprise, as her glance fell on the address on the envelope, she discovered a strong resemblance between it and the writing of the young officer. A suspicion crossed her mind. She

sent at once for the Lieutenant of Police, M. Nicolas René Berryer. This official had married a lady of Fribus, belonging to a family connected with finance, and had always been on intimate terms with the families of Lenormand d'Etioles and de Turneheim. He was in the complete confidence of the Marquise. She informed him of what had passed, and requested him to investigate the matter strictly. The Lieutenant of Police was as much struck as she was by the resemblance between the two handwritings.

"Now let us examine the powder," said he, with a smile. "I confess I am not much afraid of it."

"Are you going to have it analyzed?"

"I am going to give it to a dog or a fowl, and in an hour's time I shall know what to think of it."

The experiment was made, and no animal to which the pretended poison was administered appeared in the least inconvenienced by it.

"Marquise," said M. Berryer, "you have to do with an intriguer and an audacious imposter who has sought to interest you in his fate."

"Ah, the wretch!" exclaimed Madame de Pompadour. "I will not conceal from you that I was horribly afraid of him. Fortunately, the King was not here. But, Lieutenant, you must put an end to these atrocious jokes."

"I will engage to do that, Madame. The culprit shall not escape me."

On the following morning, while Latude, still enchanted with his interview with the Marquise, was giving himself up to all sorts of bright reveries, a police officer, named Saint-Marc, followed by several constables, inter-

rupted his dreams. He was then living in a furnished house in the Cul-de-Sac du Coq. He was hurried into a carriage, and taken to the Bastile.

CHAPTER VII

LOUIS XV AND THE PARC-AUX-CERFS

No King ever had more friends than Louis XV, and none knew better how to inspire attachments that were most sincere and most devoted, but in this respect he was somewhat spoiled—I mean, he never experienced, at all events in a proportionate degree, the sentiments he inspired. One of the leading features in his character, his sole fault, was a species of moral lassitude which smothered within him every approach to either enthusiasm of mind or outburst of heart.

Louis XV—as I think I have already said—too dearly loved and too slavishly fawned upon, was already, when Madame de Pompadour knew him, attacked by the disease which grows upon a man year by year—weariness.

He accepted affection and devotion with a skeptic graciousness, and without believing in it to any great extent. He had but little faith in disinterestedness, or even in honesty, and in him mistrust was only counterbalanced by a sort of disdainful indifference.

The philosophic movement, while wounding his religious beliefs, also made him despair of the political future of his county; the hostility of the Chambers discouraged him. Louis XV, then, was a melancholy friend, difficult to satisfy permanently in regard to his tastes, still more difficult to distract and interest. More than one woman who aspired to reign over his burnt out heart and jaded mind died in the attempt.

Such was the fate of the Duchess de Châteauroux, to whom Madame de Pompadour succeeded. She tormented the King by continually talking to him of affairs of State, his interests, and his glory.

"You are killing me!" he would say to her.

"So much the better," replied the mistress, "we must have the resurrection of a King."

And as a matter of fact she did rouse him. For some time, she succeeded in making Louis XV a chivalrous prince, but she died of the exertion. She was a woman with an amount of courage and pride thoroughly French, and she seemed to have taken Agnes Sorel as a model. The King was very much affected by her death, but, nevertheless, forgot her. But he no longer cared about any serious attachment, and Madame d'Etioles had enough to do to become Madame de Pompadour.

She set herself to work to bind him to her by an incessant variety of distractions, seeking to please him, only studying how to make him happy, ridding him as far as was possible of the cares of the throne, and smoothing over such State matters as demanded too lengthy application. The Marquise aspired to being his friend rather than his mistress, and sought to render herself, not only useful, but necessary to him.

She only lived to distract him, and sometimes he appeared touched by this.

"How good you are," he said to her. "You are very, very good to me."

And the Marquise replied, as she laid her hand on the King's heart.

"It is to that I wish to speak."

Nevertheless, when she became an invalid, and when, moreover, in the course of time the

common fate of even the most beautiful befell her, when she had lost the attractions of her early youth, she perceived that Louis, without leaving her, was capable of yielding to other fleeting impulses of passion, but she never exhibited any jealousy. Her enemies profited by this state of things and her resignation, to accuse her of infamous complacency in regard to the sensual loves of the King. The Marquise was told of this. She learnt—with intense indignation and annoyance—that she was accused—— In truth, the pen hesitates to trace such infamy, and the mind is embarrassed to find decent terms in which to describe it.

But who has not read the pamphlets of the people who use calumny as a political weapon, just as they make their politics a means to their own success? And, besides, I have in the chase ready to hand a fact which I can make use of by way of comparison. When a stag, hard pressed by the pack, is almost exhausted, he doubles; his hind, or a younger stag takes his place, bounds forth in his turn, crosses the other's scent, and replaces him. In hunting this is called a *change*. The Marquise was accused of furnishing *changes* for the King's passion.

As a matter of fact, there was no necessity that the Marquise should attend to such caprices; a valet was quite equal to that. Bontemps or Lebel—— The King had no need to blush for his weaknesses before them; they were too far beneath him. But it will be admitted without discussion, that such would not have been the case in regard to the Marquise.

Who would have thought of writing to Madame de Pompadour, as they did to Lebel, to recommend this or that pretty girl to the

favor of his master? Who is there that does not know that the King's valet was daily assailed by such requests? Nay, they went further than that. Cupidity allied itself to brazen obscenity, and unnatural parents solicited audience of the valet, who, in order to receive these shameless solicitors, had rented a house* in the Rue Saint Médéric, where he installed an old woman as caretaker.

The King appeared embarrassed whenever he thought that allusion was by chance made to these scandals. However, one day, one of his gallant adventures landed him in such an embarrassing position that he hesitated no longer, but unfolded his tale to the Marquise. He confided to her that a young girl, worthy of interest, was about to become a mother, and he begged her to watch over her with solicitude. The Marquise thanked him for his confidence; and sent Madame d'Hausset the sum of 12,000 livres for the use of mother and child. Madame d'Hausset performed her mission zealously, and was recompensed for it. Louis XV never ceased saying to the Marquise, "You really are very good. How grateful I am to you for having undertaken such a mission."

The Marquise was no less touched by the goodness of the King, and it may as well be recorded here that this mission was the sole one of its class entrusted to her.

In her heart she deplored the King's errors. This Prince had inherited the detestable morals of the Regency, and morals do not change like fashions. Everything was done to corrupt him; and later on, the basest petitions became more and more numerous, from all parts of the King-

*This was the house which was called the *Parc-aux-Cerfs*.

dom. Fathers offered their daughters, scarcely arrived at the age of puberty. Mothers hatched secret intrigues in order to contrive that their daughters should be prostituted to the caprices of the King.*

Pimps took advantage of the sports and walks of their master to excite and inflame his desires, and the struggle was as to who should trade upon these weaknesses, as pitiable as they were culpable. Such vices are only faults in the case of a great lord or a rich commoner, but in a prince they are desperately grave and invoke terrible consequences.

Anticipating the remarks of Madame de Pompadour on this subject, the King gave her to understand that he, like Louis XIV, did not desire a legitimate son, and this is confirmed by his adventure with Mdlle. de Romans. The King was passionately fond of this young girl, but as soon as she began to treat the son she bore the King as a prince, and paid him homage as such, Louis XV directed that the child should be educated apart, in ignorance of his origin, but with an ample fortune.

In these unworthy pleasures the King lost all taste for political work and, as if to console himself for his own weaknesses, he amused himself by making the police collect, from the contents of private correspondence, the secrets of the gallant intrigues of Paris.

His mind became lowered and he accustomed himself to occupations unworthy of him, and he willingly threw the care of public affairs on the shoulders of Madame de Pompadour. All political work was carried on in the private room of the Marquise. The Secretaries of State went to her with their business, the Council was often held there. A lamentable submis-

*A collection of these letters is to be found in the Archives.

sion to the Salic law. Public discontent was beginning to make itself heard, when a sinister occurrence suddenly created consternation among the friends of the King.

CHAPTER VIII

DAMIENS

On the 5th of January, 1757, at half past five in the afternoon, just as the King was starting for Trianon to pay a visit, according to his custom, to his daughters, one of whom, Madame Victoire, was ill, and as he was going down the last step of the great staircase at Versailles, a man rushed upon him and stabbed him in the left side with a pen-knife.

Neither the bodyguard, nor the Cent-Suisses were able to withstand the impetuous rush of the wretched man. Moreover, it was dark, and he first of all concealed himself under a projection at the bottom of the staircase. The Duc d'Ayen, Captain of the Guards, was taken completely by surprise. The King, after the blow was struck, said calmly, "Someone pushed me."

And putting his hand inside his waistcoat he drew it out again covered with blood.

"I am wounded, gentlemen," he continued. "See to M. le Dauphin."

Then, turning to the stranger, who remained pale and motionless a few paces off, he said,

"That is the man who struck the blow."

A rush was made at the assassin; swords were drawn, but the King, by a gesture and a few words, at once counselled calmness and circumspection.

"He must be questioned," he said; "let no harm be done to him."

And he went back to his apartments, where Quesnay, his physician, joined him immediately.

The wound appeared to be slight, but still there was a fear lest the weapon should have been poisoned, or lest some complications should set in. In this state of uncertainty, Louis declared it imperative that Dauphin should be invested with regal power to its fullest extent, and the Chancellor, having been warned, summoned the Council without delay, so that the authority of the Prince might receive formal recognition and sanction.

The accession of the Dauphin meant a thorough change of policy. The credit of the Marquise de Pompadour was suddenly shaken. Monsigneur detested her both personally and politically. The friends of the Marquise were certain to be equally repudiated by the new Sovereign.

As soon as she heard of the attack from the Duc de Richelieu, the Marquise, in alarm, made ready to go to Versailles, when she received a warning to defer her departure until she be informed as to the retreat of the King. It was quite possible that the Dauphin would refuse her admission to Versailles. Worse even than that might be in store for her.

The Marquise waited, and resigned herself to the idea of the imprisonment with which she was threatened; but, in the meanwhile, she sent to inquire after the King, whose health was of far greater moment to her than her own fate.

As a matter of fact, but a short time elapsed before MM. d'Arkenson and Machault were announced. These two Ministers and Privy Councillors represented the minority, and held by the Parliamentary party, whose hopes were centered in the Dauphin. After having been *protéges* of Madame de Pompadour for a long time, they had detached themselves from her; but at this juncture they forgot the past some-

what too abruptly, and demanded her banishment.

They came, therefore, to apprise her both of the political crisis, the direction of which they assumed, and of her own banishment, which had been insisted upon by the Lieutenant-General of the Kingdom. They were too precipitate. Meanwhile, the King had re-assured himself as to the nature of his wound, and his first words had reference to the Marquise, whose anxiety he could well imagine.

Hardly had the Ministers of the Lieutenant-General left Madame de Pompadour, when she received a visit from M. de Soubise, who came from the King to request her not to leave Versailles. On the following day Louis went to her. After what I have already said, it is easy to conceive that he certainly did not obey any impulse of passion. He only listened to the voice of friendship.

It was an open secret at Versailles that all unlawful relations between her and the King had ceased, and for a year past she had assumed the duties of Lady-in-Waiting to the Queen, who had received her graciously. The fresh mark of affection which she received from the King under the circumstances had, therefore, a serious aspect, calculated to impress her enemies; and the sudden change in the fortunes of the Marquise produced a curious commotion among courtiers who were always ready to bow the knee to whoever was in power.

—But what was being done with the assassin? Who was he, and what was the motive of his attack? As soon as he was arrested he was consigned to a dungeon. He was searched, and on him were found a considerable sum of money and a knife with two blades, one of the ordinary shape, broad and short; the other like a pen-

knife, about five inches long. He had made use of the latter.

"You have accomplices," was the first thing said to him. "Where are they?"

"They are far from here, and they will not be discovered. If I were to name them all would be over. Do not let Monseigneur le Dauphin go out today. That is all I can say."

These alarming hints hastened the assembly of a Commission of Investigation, and the prisoner had at once to undergo a preliminary examination.

He was a man, forty-two years of age, of medium height, and thick set. His countenance was repulsive, and was expressive of violence and malignity. His bloodshot eyes, his red hair and beard, and his pallid and muddy complexion, were a sufficient index of the brutality of his disposition.

He stated his name to be Robert Francois Damiens, and his birthplace the hamlet of La Thierlay, a league-and-a-half from Saint Pol, in the diocese of Arras. As he had admitted from the beginning that he had accomplices, and as he refused to name them, the Provost ordered torture to be applied. His ankles were seized by red hot pincers, but the pain only drew incoherent exclamations from him, and it became a question as to whether he was a hardened criminal, or a fool.

CHAPTER IX

TRIAL AND EXECUTION OF DAMIENS

The magistrates must have known that they had to deal with a lunatic, but they, nevertheless, set themselves to work to discover a plot, and treated the wretched man with the utmost severity. All his relations, and everybody who had been in communication with him, were arrested.

On the 9th of January, Damiens handed one of the officers a letter to the King. Here it is:

"SIRE.

"I am very sorry that I had the misfortune to approach you, but if you do not take the part of your people before a few years pass, you and the Dauphin and a few others will perish. It would be a pity that so good a Prince should, by reason of his leaning towards the ecclesiastics, not be sure of his life. And if you are not disposed to find a remedy for this, very great misfortunes will shortly happen, as your kingdom is not in safety.

"It is unfortunate for you that your subjects have resigned, for this business is due to them. And if you are not sufficiently well disposed towards your people to order the sacraments to be administered to them at the point of death, this having been refused from your lack of justice, whence the Châtelet sold the furniture of the priest who escaped, I repeat that your life is in danger.

"The Archbishop of Paris is the cause of all the trouble, because of the sacraments which he has refused.

"After the cruel crime I have just committed against your sacred person, the sincere confession which I take the liberty of making to you, allows me to hope for the favor of your Majesty's clemency.

"DAMIENS."

"I forgot to have the honor of representing to your Majesty that, in spite of the orders you gave that no harm was to befall me, that did not prevent the Chancellor having a pair of pinchers made red hot in the guard-room, he himself holding me, and ordering two guards to burn me, which was done, promising them a reward, and telling them to go and fetch two fagots and put them on the fire, so that I might be thrown into it; and that, if it had not been for M. Leclerc, who prevented them from carrying out their project, I should not have had the honor of writing the foregoing to you."

"DAMIENS."

In spite of his sufferings from the torture to which he was subjected, the unhappy man continued to display great anxiety in regard to Members of Parliament. Strange madness!

On the 17th an order was issued to transfer him to the Palace prison. It had been determined that great importance should be attached to the wretch. The carriage which conveyed him was escorted by detachments of the Garde Française and Musketeers.

The Montgomery Tower, where he was confined, was guarded by a detachment of soldiers. All this was very ridiculous, and roused public opinion in no slight degree. The room assigned to him was that in with Ravaillac had been confined. It was circular, and about twelve feet in diameter. Two narrow and barred loopholes allowed a glimmer of light to enter.

Damiens, whose limbs were bruised and swollen, was placed there on a camp bedstead, furnished with a mattress. Leather straps held him motionless, being bound round and round him, and attached to eleven iron rings fixed to the floor.

His hands alone were left free, so that he might eat. For forty-six days, he remained in this truly atrocious state. The most ingenious barbarities of past centuries were renewed for him. The official physician and surgeon were ordered to examine and taste his food.

His trial commenced on the 18th of January, and did not conclude until the 17th of March, but nothing fresh was elicited. Damiens had no accomplices. On the 26th of March, the Procureur Général gave his judgment.

The sentence consisted of the penalties usually pronounced against regicides, and the preliminary examination. This preliminary ex-

amination meant the application of the torture of the boot—four planks which crushed the legs of the prisoner by means of four wedges successfully driven in by a hammer.

Damiens bore these fresh tortures with extraordinary fortitude, merely exclaiming, "Seigneur! Messieurs!" He persisted in saying that he had not meant to kill the King, but only to give him a warning.

On the 28th the sentence was read condemning him to the punishment awarded to regicides —to ask for pardon in his shirt before the porch of Notre Dame; to have his right hand burnt in a brazier in the Place de Grève, to be then seized with pinchers by the breast, arms, thighs, and legs, to be drawn and quartered by four horses.

"It will be a hot day," he said.

He received the last consolations which remained to him, those of religion, and he was conveyed in a cart first of all to Notre Dame, and then to the Place de Grève. All this is so horrible that I can no longer continue the recital. But I imagine that these atrocities were committed with the connivance of the King who was called "The well beloved."

We will complete the narrative of the Marquise in a few lines. The punishment of Damiens was one of the most atrocious recorded in history. When his hand was burnt he uttered a cry of horror, which sounded far and wide among the silent and secretly indignant crowd.

He was then torn by pincers, and into each rent made a mixture of molten lead and boiling oil was poured.

He shrieked at each wound and called out, "My God! Strength! Strength! my Lord, my God, how I suffer! Have pity, my God!"

But the quartering surpassed even these horrors.

The horses, powerful though they were, pulled at his limbs for an hour without tearing them asunder. The cries of the victim and the imprecations of the tortures formed a concert worthy of Hell. The muscles had to be cut. When the arms and thighs were cut half through, the hauling was resumed, and a thigh and an arm were seen to be torn away. Damiens watched them go. The second thigh was torn away—the wretched man still breathed! At length his last arm came away, and he died.

Paris was for many a day in a state of feverish excitement over this execution. But what about the King, it may be asked? Louis XV saw nothing, heard nothing. Moreover, for some years past, this Prince had fallen into a state of apathetic indifference, which, in his case, reached his heart. Madame de Pompadour began to feel the effect of this.

At this time the King was fifty-four years of age. He no longer possessed any of the generous sentiments of youth. An anecdote is related of him, which gives an accurate idea of what he was. Barbier relates in his *Journal*, that the King had a dog which he had brought up and taught, and which would eat out of his hand alone. He had her taken to his hunting lodge, he fired at her, and wounded her. She ran to him and fawned upon him. He sent her from him a second time, fired at her again, and killed her. It was a cruel deed.

CHAPTER X

LAST VISIT TO CHOISY-LE-ROI

To distract the King! During the last years of the Seven Years' War and those which suc-

ceeded it, this was the most difficult duty of Madame de Pompadour. I have already recounted how the mind of Louis XV became more and more gloomy, and how his temper led him into caprices unworthy of him. On the other hand, the Marquise had lost the attractions of youth. The anxieties of business and the care of the King had hastened the ravages of time.

Louis XV had a horror of everything that reminds us of the end of our allotted term, of everything that breathes of decay and old age. The ruins of beauty, like every other ruin, and possibly more than any other, made him afraid.

Consequently, although she was frequently a martyr to suffering, the Marquise was careful to refrain from any avowal of it. A little rouge and a smile concealed her sufferings.

Her health declined rapidly, but the King was the last to perceive it. The Marquise hoped that he would never perceive it, and that she would cost him neither a tear nor any anxiety.

She displayed a more studied and a more skilful coquetry. She spread around her the brilliancy of colors, and by the splendor of her setting, and by a clever arrangement of light, she set herself to work to give increased value to an extinct beauty. She was an artist, and flattered herself on having succeeded. But what will historians say to the inventions of her furniture and her toilettes?

"Ah! gentlemen," she exclaims to them from the depths of her tomb, "this luxuriousness against which you inveigh was the luxuriousness of the King. This Sèvres porcelain, this Chinese lacquer work, these books, these statues, these pictures, and all the costly furniture at Choisy, Bellevue, and Méngars were gifts

from the King and destined for his pleasure."*

The evenings at Choisy-le-Roi had lost somewhat of their boisterous gaiety. The refinements of the table and conversation verging on seriousness strove to awaken the appetite and good humor of yore. Poets had given place to the philosophers, nationalists, and ecouomists whom Dr. Quesnay had introduced and was endeavoring to bring into fashion.

The King would scarcely see Diderot and d'Alembert, but listened willingly to young Turgot, who had been presented to him by Quesnay.

This young man was destined to rise. He succeeded in obtaining the appointment of Governor of Guiana with a hundred thousand livres a year, which was rather clever, and continued to govern his colony from Paris, which was cleverer still. M. Turgot was very intimate with Holbach, Voltaire, and d'Alembert.

Occasionally, however, the King, weary of science, only asked a limited number of intimates to Choisy—the Prince de Soubise, the Duc de Richelieu, the Marquise de Chauvelin, the Duc d'Ayen, and a few ladies; the Duchess de Grammont, de Luxembourg, and de Mirepoin, and the Marquise de Roure.

At supper Quesnay preponderated over Richelieu. Bordeaux wine, which the Duc was trying to bring into fashion, was banished from the

*The luxury of the Marquise was fabulous. The adornment of her only residence of Bellevue cost 3,000,000. In a statement of her expenses her wardrobe was valued at 350,000 livres, her Chinese lacquer work at 110,000 livres; her old china at 150,000 livres. The furniture, etc., of the castle of Crecy was valued at 60,000 livres. Her annual table expenses were 300,000 livres.

King's table, on the advice of Quesnay, as cold and indigestible.

The King only drank iced champagne; and unless the doctor put his professional veto on it, the conversation turned on all subjects that could entertain the mind—the chase, love, the opera; everything except what was serious. As a matter of fact, conferences and philosophical discourses may well be dispensed with after a Cabinet Council. The pages in waiting served up the supper with the greatest rapidity.

Nearly all of them sons of noble families, these young men were great favorites of Louis XV, and at fifteen years of age, received commissions as Lieutenants in the household regiments. Supper was the principal meal of the day, the hour of mirth and repose. During the day, the works of Leguay, Vien, and Pigalle, who had succeeded Bouchardon, sufficed to charm the leisure hours of the Marquise.

CHAPTER XVIII
ALEXANDRINE D'ETIOLES

The year 1754 was marked for Madame de Pompadour by the greatest sorrow of her life. By M. Lenormand d'Etioles she had a daughter, a charming girl of rare beauty, and endowed with every quality which a mother could desire for her child. When she separated from her husband, she sent Alexandrine to the Convent of the Assumption, whither she frequently went to see her. Alexandrine d'Etioles had scarcely attained her eleventh year, and she was already betrothed to the young Duc de Persigny, son of the Duc de Chaulnes, and nephew of Madame de Luynes, Maid of Honor and Lady of the Bedchamber to the Queen. The most brilliant destiny appeared to be in store for this dear

and graceful child. The marriage was to take place in eighteen months, when suddenly, and without any warning of so dire a misfortune the mother received news that her daughter was dangerously ill. She hastened to her side —she was dead.*

* * *

Alexandrine—the living memory of her earliest caresses. All that remained of the Marquise d'Etioles. Her mother was sixteen when she gave birth to her. With this child she had taken her earliest walks in the forest of Sénard, where soon afterwards she saw the King. Perhaps Alexandrine needed the country walks and the reviving air of the woods to which her infancy had been accustomed.

Between our birthplace and ourselves there are certain affinities which cannot be broken without danger. Her mother often noticed how pale she was; but she had herself been out of health for a long time. Madame de Pompadour, at the sight of this young corpse, felt that she had received a mortal blow, and understood, from that moment, that her end was approaching. She never got over it.

She wished her daughter to be interred at Bellevue, in the Convent of the Capucines, for whom she had built a house behind her castle, and for whom she always had a peculiar veneration. She went often to kneel in the Convent Cemetery. Thither she took all her doubts and sorrows, which she hid from the eyes of the King. Thence she brought back grave and calm thoughts which did her good, but which she confided to no one.

It was an evening in the month of November, 1757. The King had been hunting all day at

*June 5, 1754.

Choisy, and on his return from his sport, which had been very good, supper was served as usual. The Marquise had never been more gay. When the King had retired, she took M. de Soubise, in whom she had entire confidence, and to whom she had vowed unalterable friendship, aside.

"Prince," she said to him with a serious air, "I have something to confide to you."

"Speak, Marquise."

"Here," she continued, handing the Prince a sealed envelope, "is a paper which I can only confide to my best friend."

M. de Soubise accepted the paper, and noticed with astonishment, that the seals were of black wax.

"But, Madame—," he began.

"Read the inscription, Prince."

"THIS IS MY WILL."

"What, Marquise?" he exclaimed, grasping the hand of his friend hastily, "Your Will! Why, at your age, and with your health, do you dream of taking such sad precautions? Are you ill?"

"Ill, indeed, and have been so for a very long time, Prince. But, as La Fontaine says, 'Death does not surprise the wise.'"

"Madame, I am touched by this new mark of friendship, but I am also distressed to learn the secret of a sorrow which none of your friends could possibly have suspected."

"I keep my tears for my daughter, M. de Soubrise. They are all I ought to give her and can give her."

This is the Will, drawn out in the intervals of the festivities in the Castle of Choisy-le-Roi—

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

"I, Jean Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour, judicially separated from Charles Lenormand

d'Etioles, have made and written my Will. I commend my soul to God, and pray Him to have mercy on me and to pardon my sins, in the hope that His justice may be appeased by the merits of the body and blood of our Lord.

"I desire that my body may be buried in the Capucines Convent, in the Place Vendôme in Paris, in the tomb I have chosen, and that the funeral may be carried out without pomp or ceremony.

"I pray the King to accept the present I make him of my house in Paris, and should wish it to be reserved for M. le Comte de Provence.

"I also beg His Majesty to accept my precious stones, engraved by Leguay, seven bracelets, rings, and seals, to add to his collection of engraved precious stones.

"I constitute my brother, the Marquis de Marigny, my sole heir.

"I appoint as my executor under this Will, the Prince de Soubise. However painful this duty may be, he must look upon it as a certain proof of the confidence which his uprightness inspires in me. I also beg him to accept two rings, one my large *alga marina* colored diamond, the other an emerald, engraved by Leguay, representing friendship. I dare hope that he will never take it off; it will recall to his mind one person in the world who has had for him the most profound esteem and the warmest friendship.

"Done at Choisy, November 17, 1757."*

After Madame de Pompadour there is no one who has been so badly spoken of as M. de Soubise. After his defeat at Rosbach a perfect avalanche of pamphlets, songs and fury, was let loose against him. The Marquise labored under no delusion on this score, and knew perfectly well that the ridicule was indirectly addressed to her. She was the one against whom the grudge was borne. The couplets said so clearly enough.

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*At this date Madame de Pompadour was only thirty-five. She did not die until 1764.

"Strike hard, my back is broad,
Poisson supports Soubise,
And France pays for the folly."

Poisson supported Soubise to her latest hour, and Soubise at Lutzalberg had his revenge for Rosbach. But nobody sang his victory. In politics people never take into account the good you have done, or the successes you have gained, still less the efforts you have made; they only notice your defeats, and never forgive you for them.

Moreover, the people of Paris were excited against the Marquise. She, nevertheless, did her best to make them pardon her faults and her seduction. During the seven years war, she conceived the vast plan of rebuilding a portion of Paris. She had often conversed about it with Louis XV, the Marquis de Marigny, and his favorite architects, Soufflot, Gabriel, and Servandoni. Many of these ideas were never more than projects. However, she had the happiness of seeing the completion of the Place Louis XV, and the Churches of Saint Geneviève and Saint Sulpice. She planted trees in the Boulevards, as far as the Porte Saint-Martin. The whole of the old, or city part of Paris was to have been sold to a financial company, who would have completely transformed it. This new town would have been connected with both banks of the Seine by covered galleries on the bridges, ornamented with flowering shrubs and architecturel frescoes. The Luxembourg would have been joined to the Seine by means of similar galleries. The Boulevards were to have been extended as far as the Porte Saint-Honoré. A church, dedicated to Saint-Madeleine, and a palace, in the same style, were to have been built, the first at the end of the

Boulevard Saint-Honoré; the second on the left bank, and both facing the Place Louis XV.*

She thought she could never do enough for artists. She believed it to be her mission to protect them amid all the difficulties and discouragements incidental to the outset of their careers, so that in marble, bronze, and stone, they might popularize after a durable fashion, grand ideas, noble sentiments, and that love of the beautiful which is in itself an inclination towards the love of the good. She, therefore, developed the School of Rome and the institution of the prizes for painting and architecture. She also instituted exhibitions of paintings at the Louvre. The first exhibition took place at 1750, and was the triumph of Boucher, Vanloo, Vernet, Greuze and Vien. M. Diderot has left a brilliant and original record of it. It was an event.

The efforts of the Marquise were, beyond all doubt, far in excess of the duties imposed on her by the lofty station which she had not feared to accept; but she hoped that posterity, more enlightened and impartial than the opinions of her contemporaries, would do justice to her good intentions and the difficulties she encountered.

Certainly, when the Marquise indulges in retrospect, she does not hold herself exempt from blame; she judges and condemns herself severely, but without accusing her unfortunate or unskilful fellow-workers, or even her enemies, thus avoiding the first example which they so infrequently gave her. The bitter diatribes directed against Madame de Pompadour were aimed at King Louis XV. They were capable of bringing a new Damiens to life.

*This was realized by a descendant of Charles de Buonaparte, whom M. de Marboeuf recommended to Madame de Pompadour.

Nearly every day the Marquise received anonymous letters, containing threats of assassination should she refuse to conform to some line of conduct which was generally senseless. During her latest years she was threatened with death by a young man who accused her of having, in complicity with the valet Lebel, delivered up to the King a young girl to whom he was betrothed. The Marquise forwarded the letter to M. de Sartine.

The Lieutenant of Police, less for the sake of being agreeable to her than to prove once more the infallibility of the information on which he prided himself, sent his myridons afield, and discovered the unfortunate writer of the letter. Madame de Pompadour wished to see him. M. de Sartine brought him to Choisy in his carriage. He was a fine fellow, distinguished in appearance, though of humble birth, and with a countenance characterized by energy and honesty.

"Monsieur," said the Marquise to him, "are you the writer of this letter?"

"Yes, Madame," he replied curtly, as he cast an angry glance at the letter.

"And when you wrote it you were convinced of the justice of your accusation?"

"Yes, Madame."

"And, perhaps, are so still?"

He was silent.

"Answer me, please."

"Up to today nothing has occurred, Madame, to make me alter my opinion. I am bold enough to say so, although I know that my frankness will open the gates of the Bastille for me."

"You say you are frank. Tell me, then, I beg of you, on what proofs you have based your charge."

A slight blush mantled his forehead. He remained silent; the Marquise persisted.

"Will you kindly read your letter once more. You accuse me of having, in complicity with a valet named Lebel, delivered up to the furious passions of the King—those are the words you use—a young girl, your betrothed. From whom have you this fact?"

"Madame, I live at Versailles. Twenty days ago you were at the castle. Marie, my betrothed, a young girl scarcely fifteen, had with one of her friends obtained permission of a guard to walk at Trianon. I was awaiting their return. Two hours afterwards, one only of them reappeared. Marie had been carried off."

"How?"

"I know not. She had left her companions for a moment and the latter could not find her again. Twenty days have elapsed, Madame, and she has not re-appeared."

"And by whom was she carried off? By the King's valet and the Marquise de Pompadour?"

"All the world says so. It is the conviction of everybody at Versailles."

"Without proof?"

"Proofs are not easy to find, Madame. It would be quite a different thing if the guilty person were not invested with a sacred character."

"Where would you seek them?"

"You ask me that, Madame? Well, I would seek them in the place indicated by the voice of popular opinion—at Versailles, in a house in the Rue Sainte-Médéric."*

"You hear that, M. de Sartine?"

"Yes, Madame le Marquise."

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*This is the house which was called the Parc-aux-Cerfs. It belonged to the King, who sold it to Sieur Sevin, and received payment for it in gold in his private apartment.

"Well, this young man must be taken to the house in the Rue Sainte-Médéric."*

"The trouble seems to me useless, Madame," replied the Lieutenant of Police, with his malicious smile.

"And why so, Monsieur?"

"Is not the young girl who has disappeared called Marie Heurtier?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have found her; not in the Rue Sainte-Médéric, but at Paris, at the Madelonnettes. She was arrested in a house of ill fame, whither a French guard had taken and left her."

The unhappy youth turned deadly pale.

"Marie! In prison, and that disgraceful prison! Ah! my God, I have only to die!"

"Before dying, my man," said M. de Sartine, "you will do well to ask pardon of the Marquise."

"Ah, Madame!" exclaimed the poor fellow, as he fell on his knees, "I am too guilty."

"Rise," replied the Marquise. "Your betrothed shall be restored to her mother; but, another time, do not accuse anybody without proof. Not even the King," she added with a smile.

At heart the Marquise was much distressed by the calumnies wherewith her character was blackened. We may despise the judgment of the vulgar; but we cannot help feeling it. It was one sorrow more added to her failing health. She did not dare to import these sorrows to the King. Louis XV would have received them ill. He did not know—nor even did he wish to know—that the calumnies spread abroad about him and his friends were stirring up hatred, whose subsequent explosion would perhaps be terrible.

CHAPTER XVII

LAST NOTE OF THE MARQUISE

March, 1764.

"I occupy myself with my collections with an amount of seductive care which sometimes surprises me. Why do I thus hasten to end everything? Am I afraid lest time will fail me?

"A thought often comes back to me, as I look at the stones I have engraved, the initial letters and ornaments wherewith I have embellished some of my books. What will be thought of this?

"All this pre-occupation comes from one idea —that of a speedily approaching end. M. de Sartine is not willing to believe it; but my health is broken, entirely broken. The spring is coming, a season of danger to me. Neither does the King appear to see the state of decline in which I am, but the King willingly shuts his eyes to all that would sadden him.

"As for Quesnay, he at present assumes a joyous air when I speak to him of my health, and that seems an evil omen to me. His careless air is not natural. Well, I see it all, I must end all work, renounce every enterprise; my destiny is fulfilled. When from my window I look upon the woods of Sénard, and beyond them the Castle of Etioles, I ask myself if I am the sport of a long dream. All my life has been bound up in that narrow space—— Shall I die here?"

* * * * * * * * * * *

"I expected the king last evening; he did not come. What is going on at Versailles? And what is passing in my heart? Am I going to be jealous? It is high time. I must, however, accustom myself to the idea that a woman

whom I do not know will replace me in the King's affection—if not in the Council.

"I cannot conceal from myself that of the secret thoughts which assail me, this exceeds all other in bitterness. Another favorite than Madame de Pompadour—can such a thing be imagined? Will she inherit Choisy? Will she hunt at Sénard? Will she have the same admiring gentlemen around her? Certainly—but not the same artists! Pigalle will not belong to the new Court, nor Leguay, nor Vien—nor good Cardinal de Bernis. It is all the same. I should like to be able to resume my waiting on the Queen, and see what is going on at Versailles."

* * * * * * * * * * *

April 12.

"Nobody! If I stay here, at Choisy, I shall die alone. I will go to Versailles. I will write no more. It is useless labor. My sight fails me. By way of distraction I will get ready. And then most certainly I will give orders for my departure. As she is going to die it is more suitable for the poor favorite to die under the same roof as the Queen. I am the Quene's maid of honor. If I lived at Choisy to begin with, it was because my staying at Versailles was not considered tolerable. I have not forgotten it."

* * * * * * * * * * *

"I have given the order for my departure; we shall start tomorrow morning. I do not like laying down my pen without recording in the last notes the impression of a feeling which, for some days past, has overborne all others within me. This feeling is the profound anxiety which Louis XV causes me. The King will lose in me a faithful and devoted servant, his best friend. In the midst of the fierce hatreds

which are hatching around his throne, what will become of this unhappy Prince? The State is hurrying onwards to a revolution."

Here the Memoirs of the Marquise de Pompadour end. Beneath these last lines are a few words commending the autobiographical notes to the fidelity of the porter Mesnard and the memory of the Marquis de Marigny. All that now remains for us to do it to narrate her death.

LAST DAYS OF THE MARQUISE

As we have already recounted, the Marquise de Pompadour, not at the request of the King, but of her own accord, set out for, and reached Versailles. During the last days of her life, she was on excellent terms with the Queen, as the two following letters will show—

"To Madame la Marquise de Pompadour.

"Madame—

"The Queen charges me to tell you that she has nothing against you, and that she is very sensible of the attentive desire you have to please her always. She has also desired that I should send for you, and I will fulfil that duty with pleasure, Madame, knowing your sentiments, and loving yourself, and you will permit me to tell you so.

"Duchesse de Luynes."

"To Madame la Duchess de Luynes.

"You restore me to life, Madame, for, during the last three days, I have been in great trouble. Execrable aspersions have been cast on me to M. le Dauphin, and Madame la Dauphine, who have been good enough to me, to allow me to prove the falsity of the charge.

"I am told that the Queen has also been turned against me. Judge of my despair, I who would give my life for her. It is certain, that the more goodness she displays towards me, the more will jealousy strive to blacken me in her eyes.

"Believe, Madame, in the sincerity of my sentiments for you.

"Marquise de Pompadour."

Her presence at Versailles was, therefore, not in any way inconvenient. She was received there with the greatest sympathy. She was already dying. On the 13th of April, she had scarcely strength enough to dictate a codicil to be added to her first Will. We reproduce it.

"It is my wish to give to the undermentioned, so that they may remember her who has loved them—to Madame du Roure, the portrait of my poor dead child; to Madame de Mirepoin, my watch, set in diamonds, and a box with a portrait of the King; to Madame de Grammont, a box with a butterfly in diamonds; to M. de Soubise, a ring with an engraved stone, representing friendship. During the twenty years I have known him, it has been his portrait and mine.

"This codicil has been written by Colet, and I have not even the strength to sign it."

On the 14th, the Marquise sent for the priest of the parish in which her house in Paris was situated. This parish, for which she had destined the Church of the Madeleine, bears that name. The priest of the Madeleine repaired to her; and after having heard her confession, and administered the last consolations of religion, he was taking leave of her, when she said to him, with the pallid smile of a dying woman, "Wait a moment, we will go away together."

She was not mistaken. A few hours after uttering these calm words she expired, in the forty-second year of her age, and the twentieth of her reign. We say her reign advisedly, for as a matter of fact she had shared supreme power with Louis XV for twenty years. All the epithets in the world that have been heaped upon her head will not alter facts.